Teaching English Language Arts to Francophone Program Students

Grades 3 to 9

Pedagogical Considerations

Alberta
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Direction de l'éducation française

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I. BACKGROUND

Francophone schools were first established in Alberta in 1984. Over the past 20 years, their number has increased from two to twenty-five. This represents one measure of growth. Another measure, different but equally important, is the ever greater understanding of teachers and researchers regarding the teaching strategies and educational planning deemed most effective for the delivery of education in a francophone school.

In the years following the establishment of francophone schools, attention was given to the identification and implementation of the most appropriate pedagogical practices regarding the teaching of Français and of the other subject areas offered in French. These practices were considered priority areas since primary and secondary francophone schooling in a minority-language setting was such a new reality. In 1998, in answer to many requests received from the field, Alberta Learning undertook the examination of the teaching of English language arts in francophone schools. After visiting a sample of schools and speaking to teachers, it was decided that a series of documents should be produced to inform and guide the teaching of English in these schools. This series is entitled *Teaching English Language Arts to Francophone Program Students (Grades 3 to 9)*. Two documents have already been published:

- *A Guide to Transfers and Interference* (Alberta Learning, 2001)
- *Bridging the Français and English Language Arts Programs of Study* (Alberta Learning, 2001)

Teaching English Language Arts to Francophone Program Students: Pedagogical Considerations is the third and last document of this series.

Traditionally, teaching English language arts (ELA) in a francophone school has been viewed as no different than teaching this subject to students attending English or French immersion schools. Although the overall English language learning outcomes of all three programs are the same, the distinct cultural and linguistic backgrounds of francophone students demand that we take a second look at how English language instruction is planned and delivered in francophone schools as well as the respective roles of the ELA teacher, the school administrator and the parents.

This document provides a new perspective on teaching English language arts in a francophone school, a perspective that takes into account the aspirations of the francophone community within the following contexts: the federal and provincial legal provisions governing French first-language education in Alberta, the linguistic reality of Alberta's francophone students and lastly, our current knowledge regarding language learning in a minority milieu.

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II. FRANCOPHONE SCHOOLING

1. The legal basis for francophone schooling

Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) guarantees the right of francophone parents living in minority language situations to have their children educated in French. With the exception of Quebec where Section 23 applies to the English-speaking minority, elsewhere in Canada, it is meant to protect and foster the use of French in French-speaking communities. Section 10 of the Alberta *School Act* upholds the right of Charter parents to educate their children in French first language programs. As a result, Alberta's francophone schools have been established to respond effectively to the educational needs of French first language students.

Although Section 23 did not originally spell out the delivery system modalities of French language instruction, provincial courts and the Supreme Court of Canada have handed down decisions over the years that clearly indicate that these schools are to be operated and their programs designed in such a way that they make it possible for children to identify and feel at home with the community's French-speaking culture and values. These schools also have the mandate to prepare their students to become citizens who will contribute to the growth of their community, their province and their country. An essential component of this preparation is acquiring mastery not only of the French language but also of English. This objective represents one of the many challenges of francophone education.

2. The objectives of francophone schooling

The specific objectives of a French first language education reflect the unique role a francophone school plays in society. A French first language education provides a solid educational and cultural foundation that will enable students to:

- **identify with and integrate into the francophone community**
  Students master French as a first language, construct their cultural and linguistic identity as francophones, develop a sense of belonging to the regional, national and international francophone community, achieve an understanding of the history of francophones in Canada and acquire an appreciation of the multicultural and multiethnic nature of the francophone community.
- **acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes as prescribed in the Alberta Program of Studies**
  Students are required to meet all the learning outcomes prescribed for the core and complementary courses developed by Alberta Learning. They are expected to write the

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equivalent French version of the achievement tests and diploma exams administered in English schools. In so doing, francophone students receive a quality education that enables them to acquire the concepts, skills and attitudes required to meet the personal and professional challenges of the 21st century.

- **develop a high level of proficiency in the English language**
  The francophone school capitalizes on the unique opportunity francophone students living in Alberta have to become fully bilingual. Francophone students are expected to communicate and make sense of their world with first language proficiency in both French and English and to assume a meaningful role in Canadian society knowing both official languages.

3. The differences between francophone and French immersion schooling

The differences between francophone and immersion schooling remain a source of some confusion for many parents. This confusion influences their choice of school for their children and constitutes a major stumbling block to public awareness and acceptance of the necessity for francophone schooling. Consequently, it is important that all educators directly involved in educating francophone children have a clear understanding of what distinguishes francophone education from French immersion schooling. Differences between the two relate primarily to their respective clienteles, their programs and their relationship with the community.

The francophone school's clientele is composed of the children of parents who have a right to French first language education in accordance with Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, a right reaffirmed in Section 10 of the *School Act*. Regardless of the level of French language proficiency demonstrated by the children of Charter parents, they are all equally entitled to be registered in a francophone school. Much like English language schooling designed for Alberta's linguistic majority, francophone schooling is recognized as a **basic program** in Alberta. On the other hand, French immersion programs fall under Sections 11 and 21 of the *School Act* and are designated as alternative programs. Consequently, access to a French immersion program is at the discretion of every school authority.

The majority of students enrolled in immersion have English as their first language. Although immersion parents expect their children will acquire a high level of French language proficiency, they are not likely to be overly concerned about French cultural and identity issues, nor should they be unlike their francophone counterparts. Immersion parents want their children to retain their own cultural identity and not have them become francophones. With respect to language intensity, the ratio of French to English instruction varies depending on the school and grade level unlike francophone schools where all subjects except English are taught in French. French

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in a francophone school is taught as a first language. In an immersion school, it is taught as a second language. This distinction entails many differences regarding program organization and delivery as well as a school's cultural climate.

Although some adaptation is necessary in the first years of ELA instruction in a francophone school, francophone students are usually expected to achieve, by the end of Grade 3, the same ELA learning outcomes as their peers enrolled in English and immersion schools. They are expected to write and pass the Grade 3, 6 and 9 provincial achievement tests and the Grade 12 diploma exam in both English and Français. Consequently, in a francophone school, French is taught as a first language but the student is also expected to demonstrate equivalent English first language fluency.

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III. FRANCOPHONE STUDENTS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

1. The linguistic reality of francophone students

The French language skills of students attending francophone schools vary quite significantly. Indeed, one can observe in most francophone schools the complete range of bilingual competence. This continuum begins with a few students who only speak French, then students with varying degrees of English/French fluency to students who are unilingual English. Consequently, school administrators and teachers are faced with the unique challenge of accommodating the educational needs of children whose language proficiency may range from age-appropriate first language fluency to little or no knowledge whatsoever of French or English. The first step in meeting this challenge is to acknowledge this situation and to understand why such a diversity of linguistic proficiency may be present in a francophone school.

The intensity and type of linguistic interaction in the home and community contribute significantly to this variance. A child's daily experiences with French in the home — verbal interactions with parents and siblings, watching French videos, DVDs and TV, listening to French songs, reading French stories, newspapers, etc. — are a powerful determinant of the level of French language fluency upon entering school. As well, children who have relocated from majority French-speaking regions have a strong foundation of French language skills and are ready to take on the challenges of a French first language education. On the other hand, when the primary caregiver is not francophone or when francophone parents, for whatever reason, do not speak to their children consistently in French, the French language skills of these children will be underdeveloped. This is why francophone schools will provide these children with special French language upgrading opportunities known as "programme de francisation".

One may wonder why French-speaking communities in Alberta are not as successful in raising French-speaking children today as they were in years past. Over time, the vitality of francophone communities in Alberta has eroded. Consequently, the forces normally at work in the natural process of mother tongue transmission from one generation to the next are no longer as effective as they once were, and in some cases, not present. The use of the French language and the celebration of French culture have decreased to the extent that English has replaced French as the language spoken on the streets of once predominantly francophone communities and even in many of the homes where both parents speak French fluently. The loss of vitality of too many of Alberta's French-speaking communities is the single most important reason why so many "francophone" children are entering francophone kindergartens with little or no French language skills and are strangers to the culture and the values of their French-speaking community.

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2. Additive and subtractive bilingualism

In light of the linguistic reality of Alberta's francophone students, how can the partnership school-home-community ensure that these students become effective speakers and writers of both French and English? This question has led researchers to investigate more closely the issue of bilingualism. Two key concepts have resulted from this research: additive bilingualism and subtractive bilingualism.

a. Additive bilingualism

A bilingual person has the ability to use two languages to learn and to communicate. The level of fluency achieved by a person in each language is mainly contingent upon two factors: motivation to learn and degree of exposure to both languages. The respective roles and effectiveness of a bilingual person's two languages are determined largely by the level of mastery achieved in each language, their relative social status in the immediate community and in the broader social environment as well as the individual's perception of their value and acceptance by those who define what is important, i.e., peers, family, and significant persons in the school and community.

The overall experience of learning two languages can be viewed as positive or negative according to whether or not it benefits the learner. If the experience proves to be an advantage for the learner, the experience is said to be one of "additive bilingualism", a type of highly developed, balanced bilingualism where learning the majority language (English) does not lead to diminished or inadequate development of the minority language (French). Additive bilingualism is the natural outcome of a win-win approach to learning two languages. This entails maintaining high proficiency in both languages, developing a strong ethnolinguistic identity, having a positive attitude towards both cultures and conferring equal social status on both languages.

b. Subtractive bilingualism

If the experience of learning two languages disadvantages the learner, it is referred to as "subtractive bilingualism". Subtractive bilingualism occurs when learning the second language impedes the acquisition of the first language, contributes to some confusion about one's cultural identity, or results in a decreased sense of community affiliation. From a language-only perspective, the most dramatic and devastating result of a subtractive bilingual experience would be "semi-lingualism". This is defined as the inability to use either language effectively for the purposes of communication, cognitive functioning and academic achievement.

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Subtractive bilingualism has been used to designate the language learning experience of minority language children taught in the majority group's language with little or no consideration given to their first language skills and educational needs. Research has shown that the indiscriminate exposure of minority language children to the majority population's language bears a high cost in terms of first language development, self-concept, perception of the value of the first language, cultural identity development and ultimately, community affiliation.

c. Additive bilingualism and French immersion

Research has clearly shown that majority language children exposed to a second language through immersion benefit from the advantages of additive bilingualism. Acquiring a second language in an immersion environment does not jeopardize the first language skill development of majority language children. The strength and energy of the majority language environment sustains the development of majority language skills even though the most of the student's schooling in the early years is conducted in French. In addition to learning French, the immersion student acquires English language skills and achieves academically as well if not better than his or her unilingual English-speaking peers.

At first glance, the concepts of additive and subtractive bilingualism appear easy to grasp. However, they have been the subject of some misunderstanding over the years. People have assumed erroneously that all bilingual learning experiences are equally additive. The widespread popularity of French immersion as an effective bilingual learning experience may have clouded some educators' and parents' understanding of the educational needs of minority language children. The decision of many parents of French minority language children to enrol them in immersion instead of francophone schooling can be traced to a tendency to overgeneralize the success story of immersion programs to include minority language children.

For immersion children, learning French is a bonus. There is no danger that their first language, English, will not be valued in their immediate and broader communities. However, for francophone program students, their first language, French, may not enjoy the same status as English. Parents and educators have to be aware of the perceptions some francophone children may have of the comparative value of both languages, perceptions that influence their motivation to become truly bilingual. As discussed earlier, these factors play an important role in determining whether the francophone child's dual language experience will be additive or subtractive.

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d. The "English-speaking only" francophone student

It should be pointed out that there is a group of "francophone" children who, in fact, could become candidates of additive bilingualism in either immersion or francophone school environments. The children of many parents who have a right to enrol their children in francophone schools have English as their first, and in many cases, as their only language upon entering school. If these children are exposed to immersion schooling, they will acquire French as a second language like any other majority student enrolled in a similar program, and akin to any other majority language student, their bilingual experience should prove to be additive. However, were these same children enrolled in a francophone school, a different set of factors would enter the additive bilingualism equation.

In fact, if they wish to ensure that their child's bilingual experience is additive, the parents of a unilingual English "francophone" child will be called upon to play a very different role whether they opt for an immersion or francophone program. The parents' commitment to the linguistic, cultural and community-regeneration goals of francophone schooling and their willingness to invest time and energy in the language and cultural identity development of their children are viewed as conditions for additive bilingualism in a francophone school setting. By placing a unilingual English speaking "francophone" child in a francophone school, a parent is in fact choosing to make a second language, French, a first language. This means that the child will come to master it to the point where he or she will feel equally comfortable in both French and English-speaking environments, will come to integrate into the French minority community and will achieve a positive francophone cultural identity.

e. Learning conditions

Whether the child's first language upon school entrance is French, English, or both, those responsible for francophone schooling must create and maintain the learning conditions that pave the way to additive bilingualism for all their students. If the minority francophone child's bilingual experience is to be "additive", the learning environment must be such that it ensures that the French language becomes entrenched as an effective tool to negotiate and communicate meanings related to personal development, academic achievement and community involvement. If, during the course of the minority francophone child's schooling, English becomes or remains the dominant language, the goal of francophone education will not have been achieved.

Effective francophone schooling is a responsibility shared by parents, teachers and the French-speaking community. No matter the quality of instruction in a francophone program,

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no matter how extensive and comprehensive the extracurricular programs aimed at creating a francophone climate, without significant parental commitment and community involvement, francophone schooling will remain a limited means of achieving additive bilingualism.

3. The relationship between French and English language learning

The key to ensuring that all students achieve, by the end of Grade 12, a high level of fluency in both French and English, and are successful in every aspect of their francophone school experience is to make the acquisition of French language skills the primary target from the outset of their education. Although the emphasis on French language acquisition must be maintained throughout the students' schooling, the focus on French skill development is most evident from Kindergarten to Grade 2 when they receive instruction exclusively in French. The intent of this practice is to allow them to consolidate their first language skills and enhance their knowledge and understanding of language in general. By delaying English instruction until Grade 3, students have the opportunity to firmly establish basic skills in French and become increasingly confident French language learners. This practice provides a strong foundation of first language skills upon which English language learning may be based.

Contrary to a widely held and resilient belief among parents and even among some teachers, delaying the introduction of English language instruction does not place francophone students at a long-term disadvantage when compared with English language learners. Due to the highly comparative nature of French and English, students instructed exclusively in French enter Grade 3 equipped with many skills, attitudes and knowledge related to how language works. In fact, most francophone students have learned to read and write in French by Grade 3. Introducing English language arts after they are already reading helps avoid the possible confusion experienced by some children who learn to read in two languages simultaneously.

As students consolidate their French and English language skills, they embark upon a journey toward balanced bilingualism, one where they will not be forced to acquire English at the expense of their French language skills or their ability to be contributing members in their French-speaking community. This complex interplay between the French and English language learning experiences moulds the language reality of students attending francophone schools in Alberta. This reality presents major challenges to educators who become, in a manner of speaking, stage directors in the complex dynamics that constitute the acquisition of the French language and culture by children of the French language minority group in a broader English language majority setting.

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4. Francophone students and English language mastery

The francophone school's main thrust is French language mastery as well as the development of and pride in one's French identity. Notwithstanding this key priority for all francophone schools, English language acquisition is not relegated to secondary status. Francophone schools acknowledge that minority language students live in a predominantly English milieu and recognize English language learning as an integral component of francophone students' overall education. In spite of their commitment to their children achieving French first language mastery, francophone parents are not likely to lose sight of the fact that their children's future will play itself out in social, political and economic environments where English language mastery will very much be a condition of success. Consequently, the objectives flowing from parents' expectations relative to their children's acquisition of English language skills must be clearly stated and integrated in the school's English programming.

As stated on page 5, some francophone students attending a francophone school may have little or no knowledge of English. These students originating mainly from Quebec and French-speaking countries may be found in all grades. This challenging situation requires adaptations regarding timetabling and student grouping as well as the implementation of English as a second language teaching strategies.

To avoid any overlap and maximize opportunities for language transfer, the objectives related to English language acquisition should dovetail with those identified for French first language mastery. Ideally, English language learner outcomes in francophone and English schools will differ only with respect to the timeframe for their achievement. Generally, by the end of Grade 6, students in a francophone school are expected to perform at a level equivalent to their English school counterparts in the following areas: listening, reading and the correct use of vocabulary and sentence structures in their oral and written expression. By the end of Grade 9, they should be able to understand more subtle meanings associated with idioms and cultural referents as well as use them in their oral and written speech. By the end of Grade 12, francophone students should be able to communicate in English with first language fluency and have developed an appreciation of the English language and culture in their community, Canada and the world.

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IV. THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER IN A FRANCOPHONE SCHOOL

1. The ELA teacher is an integral member of the school personnel

English language arts teachers in a francophone school are an integral part of a team of teachers the majority of whom are focussed on the school's objectives related to French language mastery and cultural identity development. In this school environment, the students' achievement of the outcomes of the English language arts program is left almost exclusively to the ELA teachers. In many cases, these teachers become the sole models of the English language in the school. They are the source of knowledge and celebration of the English language and the point of contact between the students' established French language skills and their English language learning. They help students build linguistic bridges that maximize their overall language learning potential. These teachers must be equipped with a unique repertoire of knowledge, attitudes and skills in order to make sound pedagogical decisions regarding the English language learning of their students.

2. The ELA teacher understands, respects and supports the principles of the francophone school

Like their francophone colleagues, ELA teachers in a francophone school must share the vision of minority language schooling and understand, respect and support its underlying principles. English language arts teachers have an important responsibility to understand the language learning reality of francophone students and the aspirations of the minority language community. The respect, understanding and value they place on the linguistic and cultural experiences of their students directly enhance or detract from their identity development, a crucial factor in effective minority language education. By promoting the development, maintenance and the search for excellence of their students' French language skills, English language arts teachers become full-fledged partners in ensuring the acquisition and maintenance of solid French first language skills, the francophone child's basis for additive bilingualism.

3. The ELA teacher creates a dynamic, authentic language learning environment

a. The physical context

The English language arts classroom is a micro-community within the larger context of a francophone school. The ELA teacher's role is to create a dynamic and authentic physical environment where students enjoy English language learning and flourish as English language learners.

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The English language arts classroom should have a vibrant and friendly look and feel to it. Colourful displays of work praise the efforts of students. Bulletin boards produced by and for students celebrate English and enhance the overall status of learning it. English books, attractively arranged, invite students to read. Exposing children to genuine English literature such as *Mud Puddle* by Robert Munch illustrates the common cultural bond that francophone students share with the children depicted in English books. This may reinforce a sense of belonging to the world of English language learning.

Labelled objects, English posters or a wall displaying an alphabetical list of frequently misspelled words can assist students develop vocabulary and proper spelling by supplying their visual memory with the correct image of unfamiliar or problematic words. Listening, reading and writing centres where students can choose activities provide them with a sense of control over their learning environment. An effective physical environment creates an attractive and welcoming classroom that stimulates interest in and supports the learning of the English language arts.

b. The social context

Francophone students experience English language learning with mixed feelings of excitement and apprehension. For most, formal English language learning is a natural extension of their English language use at home or in the community. Students with well-established English skills view the ELA class as an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge to both the teacher and fellow students. On the other hand, students whose English skills are more limited, may feel shy and reluctant. Students who have experienced much success learning French but have had limited opportunity to develop their English skills, may be most intimidated. Problems such as understanding spoken English, speaking English with an identifiable accent or difficulties with spelling and writing make these students more vulnerable to the anxieties of perceived failure.

The social context of the ELA classroom can allay the fears students may experience as they begin formal English language learning. A classroom based on respect for the students' first language experience and consideration of the heterogeneous nature of their English language skills reflects a learning climate conducive to motivation and risk taking, important elements in second language learning.

During the transition years, the English language skills of students are most varied. Respect for and understanding of individual differences become paramount. Students whose English

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skills are less developed are not necessarily less competent; rather they may not have been exposed to English with the same intensity as those whose skills are more advanced. Pairing stronger students with those who have less developed skills encourages a sense of responsibility for the students' own learning and that of their classmates. It provides a productive context for social interaction and gives students the opportunity to apply the language arts in a meaningful context.

Focussing beginning activities on oracy skills (generally the most developed) provides students with the opportunity to succeed. Employing writing, proofreading and evaluation strategies that focus on what the students are doing and then providing them with strategies to identify, understand and correct their mistakes will encourage students to take risks and expand their English language learning horizons. (See *A Guide to Transfers and Interference.*)

4. The ELA teacher helps students understand their bilingualism

The English language arts teacher has the important task of helping students understand the complexity of their bilingualism. Francophone students experience early the challenges and rewards of second language learning. Informing students of what to expect when they begin formal English language learning prepares them for the challenges they are about to face. The inevitable triumphs and challenges that lie ahead as a result of language learning processes such as filtering, transfer, interference and reinvestment must be well understood by both teachers and students. (See p. 17-19.)

In the transition years, students need to know why they may initially experience spelling difficulties while some students can already read in English without any formal instruction. Students in higher grades need to know how their search for excellence in French and their knowledge of French enhance their English language learning. Students should be led to discuss and understand the complexities of their linguistic reality. Terms such as "interference", "transfer", "reinvestment", and "additive bilingualism" should echo in the English language arts classrooms of francophone schools.

The ELA teacher can help students contextualize this vocabulary by initiating discussions at all stages of English language learning. From Grades 3 to 6, discussions should be based on language transfer as a natural process in second language learning, a process fraught not only

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with possibilities of interference and difficulty but also with opportunities for success. Following are examples of activities in support of this objective:

- ✓ Hand out an English text and ask students to underline words that are the same in French.
- ✓ Ask students why they are able to read in English before Grade 3 or after only a few months of formal English language instruction. Do not be surprised if students say they learned to read from television. Arouse their curiosity by saying that their parents taught them to read in English when they read French books to them or that their Grade 1 Français teacher actually taught them to read in English, then explain.
- ✓ Provide students with opportunities to compare French and English. Handout French/English dictionaries and have them count the number of words that appear under "w" in each language. Then have the students look closely at the "w" words in French and prompt them to note that most of these words are borrowed from other languages. They may conclude that the letter "w" plays a far less important role in French than it does in English.

Junior and senior high students are ready to reflect on more personal experiences with English language learning, both positive and negative. Have students work in groups to discuss issues surrounding their bilingualism. Provide them with the opportunity to discuss their frustrations when they have to search for a specific word, speak in public in English, speak English with a French accent, etc. Allowing students to discuss such issues in the safe and supportive atmosphere of the English class equips them with the confidence and vocabulary necessary to explain their decisions regarding French first language education in English as well as in French.

5. The ELA teacher encourages the positive transfer of established French language skills

At the onset of formal English language arts instruction, students may begin to view their knowledge of French as a barrier to learning English. In their enthusiasm to learn English they may, for example, ask their parents to start speaking to them solely in English or decide that they will read only English books in order to "catch up" on their English skills. Although well intentioned, such actions are highly unnecessary. The English language arts teacher can correct this misconception by helping students understand that their knowledge of French is in fact a vehicle, not a barrier to English language learning.

A wealth of transfer possibilities awaits those francophone students who use strategies for language transfer. By reminding students of specific areas of positive transfer such as rhyme, phonetics, narrative structure and vocabulary, students will begin to appreciate that many of their

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French language skills are readily transferable to English language learning. Knowing this, students will eventually search for opportunities to use their knowledge of French to enhance and strengthen their English language skills.

Basing English language arts instruction on the students' prior knowledge of both French and English is another effective means of eliciting transfer. When introducing a language concept in English, encourage students to discover what the "language link" or transfer, from French might be. Prompt students by using the terms they may be using in French for the same concept or give examples of the language link in French. (See *A Guide to Transfers and Interference*, p. 47.)

Providing students with language learning strategies that incorporate their knowledge of French is a fundamental task of the English language arts teacher. When students attempt to spell the word "tragic", they should think about what they know in French that might help them to spell the word (e.g. "tragi" is transferable). Then they may think about what they know in French that might interfere with spelling the word in English, e.g. "que" is written "ic" in English. (See *A Guide to Transfers and Interference*, p. 51.)

Such strategies will help students use their knowledge of French to become proficient English language speakers and writers. It is important to note that the ELA teacher must be knowledgeable about the comparative nature of French and English in order to communicate the possibilities of transfer to students. English language arts teachers with little knowledge of French may be limited in their ability to carry out this fundamental task.

6. The ELA teacher helps students minimize interferences

As students are exposed to an increasing amount of English language learning activities, they gain greater awareness of the language structures specific to both French and English. This knowledge equips them with the information required to minimize errors arising from interference. Interferences, often evident in the transition years when the students' formal English skills are very limited, reflect the trial and error process of filtering English language tasks through their system of established French language skills. Students assume that what is true of the French language is also true of English or, they have no English language reference to replace the interference transfers they make.

The role of the English language arts teacher is to provide students with meaningful context-embedded activities that allow them to better understand how the English language works and how it differs from French. Over time, as students read a variety of authentic English texts, write,

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speak, view, and represent in English, they will develop a repertoire of English specific word patterns, letter combinations and sentence structures to replace the incorrect overgeneralizations they transfer from French.

7. The ELA teacher collaborates with other English language arts teachers

Professional collaboration among teachers is always beneficial to students. Collaboration among ELA teachers in a francophone school is especially valuable in the transition years when delivery of the program may be adapted to meet the specific needs of students.

To ensure a seamless program, elementary ELA teachers should plan together how the program will be delivered in Grades 3 to 6, including which skills may need more emphasis due to interference and which established French skills should be targeted for positive transfer. They should undertake collaborative long-range planning to ensure that no gaps occur in the students' English language learning experiences. These co-operative efforts should prompt teachers to share effective strategies unique to their position as English language arts teachers in a francophone school.

8. The ELA teacher collaborates with the teachers of Français

In a francophone school, formal language learning is the shared responsibility of the Français and English language arts teachers. Collaboration between the two groups fosters opportunities to enhance the students' overall language learning experience. The Français teacher can provide the English language arts teacher with an overview of the ongoing French language learning experience of the students. Joint long and short term planning sessions could include the possibility of integrating common outcomes or complementary topics/themes.

Français and ELA teachers at the same grade level can work together to establish uniform expectations for written assignments, homework, etc. They can discuss and target problem areas their class might be experiencing in both languages such as punctuation. Ongoing co-operation may increase transfer, decrease interference and maximize instructional time thereby enhancing the overall language learning of their students.

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V. WHAT UNIQUE BANK OF KNOWLEDGE SHOULD AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER POSSESS?

1. The concept and implications of additive bilingualism

In Alberta, additive bilingualism means that the French language must be bolstered constantly so that it continuously provides a solid basis for learning. As students develop and maintain a strong foundation in their French language skills, they till the fertile ground from which successful English language learning experiences can be harvested. Optimum French language learning means that excellence in both languages is possible.

If English is learned at the expense of French language skills, the students are then in a language deficit situation or subtractive bilingualism mode. When students fail to maintain their first language skills, they fail to maximize their opportunities to develop their identity as francophones, risk losing the opportunity to achieve a high calibre of balanced bilingualism, and can no longer capitalize on using their first language to enhance their English language learning. As French language fluency decreases, students must learn English structures in isolation without the support of established French language skills, and eventually English may replace French as a functional first language. Most importantly, students in a subtractive bilingualism mode do not benefit from the cognitive benefits of learning a second language and may not achieve an optimum level of fluency in either French or English.

2. The basic principles of second language learning

Although the majority of francophone students who begin formal English language learning are not considered ESL students, many ESL principles apply to their English language learning experience. When English language arts is first introduced, the francophone students may display a knowledge of English ranging from basic speaking and oral comprehension skills to the ability to read and write at grade level. Students who have relocated from predominantly French areas in Canada and the world may have very little knowledge of English whatsoever. An awareness of the basic principles of second language learning will assist the English language arts teacher in understanding the principles underlying second language acquisition.

a. Filtering

This is the process by which second language skills are filtered through the established first language skills of the learner. As students are required to speak, read, write, think and respond in English, they rely on their skills gleaned from formal and informal language learning experiences in French. Students filter their language tasks in English (i.e., writing a word or understanding narrative structure) through their established French language skills.

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When they find information they consider to be a "point of contact", they apply it to English. Filtering is the natural trial and error process of second language learning and a critical component in English language learning for francophone students.

b. Positive transfers

As students search through their bank of French language skills to assist them carry out a task in English, they often find exactly what they need. Instances where established first language skills apply equally to second language learning is referred to as positive transfer. Due to the high degree of correlation between the French and English languages, there are many opportunities for students to effect positive transfer from French. Students who read and write in English before English language instruction demonstrate positive transfer. Other students do so more gradually with the encouragement and expertise of the English language arts teacher.

c. Interference errors

The process of applying established French language skills to English does not always produce a positive result. Interference errors occur when French language skills are overgeneralized and incorrectly applied to English. For example, a student may have to write the word "judge" in English. After filtering this task through his/her knowledge of French, the student may determine that because the word sounds similar and has the same definition as the French word "juge", it must have the same spelling. Consequently, the student writes the word "juge" instead of "judge". This is a classic example of interference.

Interference errors reflect points of incompatibility between French and English. They are predictable and may be corrected by making students aware of the possibilities of interference, by exposing them to appropriate English language structures and providing them with strategies to correct specific interferences. (See *A Guide to Transfers and Interference.*)

Specific points of interference should not be corrected solely through isolated drills and worksheets. Students should be made aware of how French and English are inherently different by also using context-embedded activities. For example, the teacher can illustrate the position of adjectives describing color in a sentence by first talking about objects in the classroom beginning with the sentence prompt "In our classroom, we have a white board." Students could then find ten objects they must describe to the class from their home using the sentence prompt " In my room, I have a _____ ." Authentic English language learning activities will help students use language appropriate structures in both French and English.

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d. Reinvestment

Transfer occurs when students use first language skills to enhance second language learning. When students use their knowledge of a second language to enhance first language learning, this is referred to as reinforcement. At the onset of English language learning, students transfer their established knowledge of French to enhance English language learning. For example, students in Grade 3 may use their knowledge of consonant sounds in French to help them read in English. As students' knowledge of English grows they begin to reinvest their increasing knowledge of English back to French. For example, a student in Grade 9 may apply what he has learned about developing the introduction of an essay in English to writing a text in French. The process of reinvestment results in an even greater mastery of the French language.

e. Knowledge of the Français program

It is sound pedagogy to base English language teaching on the students' established French language skills. Knowledge of the Français program will help teachers understand their students' overall formal French language learning experience. The Français program can provide teachers with insight into what students already know or have been taught about language, and the possibilities of transfer and interference of French language skills to English language learning. (See *Bridging the Français and English Language Arts Programs of Study.*)

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VI. THE ADMINISTRATOR AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Administrators of francophone schools are instrumental in ensuring that the English language learning experience of their students is successful. Of all the effective administrative practices administrators are expected to implement, two deserve special mention in this particular learning context.

1. Maintain a school climate abundant in French language and culture

A school climate abundant in French language and culture helps constitute the crucial building blocks of additive bilingualism. Given the reality of minority language education, students need every opportunity to speak, hear, read, write, learn and celebrate in French. For some, the school is the only place where this is possible. Every step should be taken to ensure that students are exposed to a vibrant French first language atmosphere in the school.

When French is the sole language of communication in the school, students are provided with the exposure to the French language they need to consider French as a viable means of communication. If students are expected to be consistent in their use of French, school policies should present them with strong models of consistency. For example, intercom messages, bulletin board announcements, the language of communication of the personnel and students should be in French. The school should encourage affiliation with francophone organizations and/or businesses in the community. Activities with such organizations confirm that the French language "lives" outside the walls of the school. Students are then given the opportunity to form social and cultural relationships in French outside the school.

2. Ensure the ELA teacher is an excellent cultural and linguistic model of English

When learning French in a minority language situation, the "one language/one model" paradigm is key. Students learn most effectively with a teacher who is a strong linguistic and cultural model and a source of excellence in the French language. They are more likely to speak to that teacher consistently in French, and speak in French to others in the presence of that teacher. Ideally, the teacher, the classroom, and the school act as cues that prompt students to speak and learn in French. In a francophone school, students should be getting a clear message: "To this person, during this situation, and in this place, we spontaneously speak French". The "one language/one model" paradigm establishes important patterns of behaviour based on person, time, place and circumstance cues and should be a major consideration in the administration of a francophone school.

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The "one language/one model" paradigm applies equally to English language learning in a francophone school. Students should receive clear messages regarding when, where and with whom they speak and learn in English. In order to shape this behaviour, students need clear unambiguous cues: an English language arts teacher who is a strong linguistic and cultural model as well as a source of excellence in the English language, a classroom which students identify as being a solely English milieu, appropriate resource materials in English and the opportunity to celebrate their successes as English language learners.

3. When a francophone teacher teaches English...

The "one language/one model" paradigm cannot always be applied. In many instances, teachers who are considered strong linguistic and cultural models of French also teach English language arts. In some cases, students receive English and French language instruction from the same teacher. In other cases, another francophone teacher, other than the students' teacher of French, teaches English. This situation presents the following challenges and opportunities for teachers and students.

- ✓ Although it is possible that a francophone teacher possesses a mastery of the English language equalling that of a first language speaker, this may not always be the case. Francophone students should be given optimum conditions in which to learn English. These conditions include receiving instruction from a teacher who has an excellent mastery of all the English language and understands well the ELA program. This standard should never be compromised regardless of who delivers the English language arts component of the francophone program.
- ✓ Although a francophone teacher can serve as an excellent linguistic model of English, it is less likely that the same teacher can serve as a model of both English and French culture. Strong cultural models are important to both French and English language learning. Anglophone guests from the community, authors, speakers, and anglophone parents may be asked to help the teacher enrich the cultural aspects of the English language arts program.

4. Teaching ELA in the Français classroom

When a francophone teacher teaches English language arts in the same environment used to teach French, linguistic stimuli become mixed and the "one language/one model" cueing system is disrupted. People, places and situations that students have learned to identify exclusively with French become identified with English. Students may wonder when and where it is appropriate to speak, learn and live in French and where and when it is appropriate to speak, learn and live in English. Teachers may notice an increase in English spoken during periods other than English

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language arts. If ELA is to be taught in the French classroom, the following should be considered.

- ✓ Except for specific references to French for transfer purposes, an effective ELA program should be delivered entirely in English. Students may find it difficult to switch to English with a teacher they usually identify as a French language model. Vigilance on the part of the teacher to ensure that both the students and the teacher speak only in English is necessary if students are to benefit fully from learning English in an authentic English language environment.
- ✓ In a few instances, some students' French skills are more developed than their English skills. As a result, they have a strong tendency to speak to the teacher and other students in French during the ELA class. They realise that the other children and the teacher will understand them should they speak French so they opt not to use English. Secondly, the "highest common denominator" phenomenon comes into play. Communication between two people who speak more than one language will gravitate toward the language that produces the most effective communication. In the case of francophone students and a francophone teacher, that language is most often French. Students may not force themselves to speak in English during English instruction if they know that they can be readily understood in French. With clear expectations and consistent interventions, the teacher can help students to identify the English period as a time to speak and learn in English only.
- ✓ If English is taught in a French classroom, teachers may be reluctant to mix French and English visual supports. They may hesitate to create more stimuli that could induce students to speak in English at inappropriate times. A specific area should be set aside for English. English books, reference materials and displays support learning and motivate children to learn. Visual aids and visual celebrations of student work are important in all subject areas, including English language arts.

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VII. THE PARENT AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Parents who register their children in a francophone school expect that by the end of Grade 12, they will have achieved a high level of first-language fluency in both French and English. This challenge to both students and educators is often compounded by the varying levels of commitment to francophone schooling manifested by parents. In some cases, parents are ardent supporters of the francophone school's mission and are willing to invest time and energy to make it happen. Other parents may willingly transfer this responsibility to the school. Parental involvement in francophone schooling is an essential element in the success of each student and the overall success of the school in meeting the goals of a francophone education.

Teachers and administrators have an important responsibility to help parents become informed members of the francophone school community. An important component of this information should deal with English language learning. Information sessions held early in the year can guide the parents' understanding of their child's English language learning experience. Informed parents can provide students and teachers with invaluable support and are better prepared to justify and defend their decisions to provide their children with a French first language education.

Following are suggested topics that could be covered during these information sessions:

- ✓ *The expectations of the ELA program for students enrolled in a francophone school*
  - How the English and Français programs are mutually supportive.
  - Comparison of English language learning in the English, immersion and francophone programs.
  - The rationale for delaying the introduction of English language arts.
- ✓ *The linguistic reality of francophone students*
  - Additive bilingualism.
  - Balanced bilingualism.
  - Filtering, positive transfer, interference, reinvestment.
  - Perspective from which ELA instruction is approached, i.e., basing new ELA learning on the students' prior knowledge of French and English.
- ✓ *The transition years (Grades 3 to 6, Grade 12)*
  - Children enter English language learning with a wealth of skills that are readily transferable to English.
  - The wide range of English skills present in a classroom is normal.

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- It is not unusual for students to begin English language learning with mixed emotions ranging from enthusiasm to anxiety.
- Why some students enter Grade 3 knowing how to read in English without having received formal instruction.
- How students benefit from a supportive and encouraging home environment that respects the time it takes for language learning transitions to occur.
- The period of adjustment francophone students may experience when they attend English post-secondary institutions.

✓ *How parents can contribute to the success of their child's English language learning*

- Build on first language skills to ensure mastery of French and English.
- Support francophone schooling.
- Provide students with a French language learning environment that enriches their French language skills.
- Read to their children.

✓ *How to build realistic expectations based on their child's...*

- Mother tongue language abilities.
- Talent or "ear" for learning languages.
- Personality and learning style.
- Attitude and motivation to learn languages.

✓ *Specific strategies geared to help parents deal with homework* (See *A Guide to Transfers and Interference.*)

- Spelling strategies.
- Proof-reading strategies.
- Editing strategies.

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VIII. CONCLUSION

There is only one measure for the teaching of all subjects in a francophone school: success for all students. This same standard holds true for English language arts. Everyone from students to the francophone community has but one expectation for the level of ability achieved by francophone parents in English language arts: high proficiency.

Academic success is not the result of chance. It involves motivated students, supportive parents and competent teachers. It requires efficient planning, teaching and evaluation. This document will have fulfilled its purpose if it helps teachers, administrators and parents become effective partners in assisting students meet the standards established for Alberta Learning's English language arts program.

The three documents of the *Teaching English Language Arts to Francophone Program Students* may be found on Alberta Learning's web site at: < http://learning.gov.ab.ca/french >. Click on: *Éducation francophone*.

Readers are encouraged to refer to the following publications for complementary information on the role and place of English language arts in a francophone school setting:

- ✓ *I'm with you! Exogamous families' guide to the world of francophone education*. Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta, 2002.
- ✓ *Affirming Francophone Education — Foundations and Directions*. Alberta Learning, 2001.

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